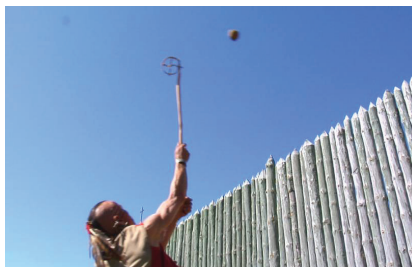


Sacred Stick

VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



Program Synopsis

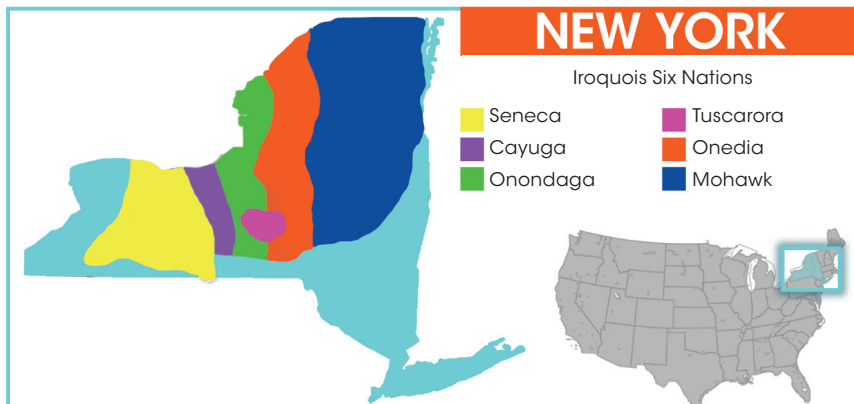
***"Before there was light,
before there was earth, the
game was played."***

— Oren Lyons,
Onondaga Faithkeeper



Photos from top left: **Player hurls ball over the wall.** Photo by Michelle Danforth and Patty Loew. **Face-off between Iroquois Nationals and USA.** Photo by Michelle Danforth and Patty Loew. **An Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse coach speaks to one of the team's lacrosse players.** Photo by Michelle Danforth and Patty Loew. **Ball games like lacrosse sometimes were played by entire villages across miles of territory. Some games lasted for days.** Image courtesy of National Archives, believed to be circa 1846-1850.

Sacred Stick is a documentary that explores the history and culture of the game of lacrosse intertwined with the Iroquois Nationals and their journey to the 2007 World Indoor Lacrosse Championships. Much more than just a Native American ball and stick game, lacrosse is a cultural window into Native American communities and their historical relationship with each other and the dominant culture.



Producer's Notes



Michelle Danforth (Oneida)

"For me, it was about creating something that my son and his friends would want to watch. Lacrosse is so important to many Native people, so sharing a small piece of it is equally exciting. When I first started, all I knew was that my husband

had played lacrosse long ago, but the more I have learned, the more fascinated I am to learn even more."



Michelle Danforth films an opening sequence for *Sacred Stick*.

Photo by Jim Parish, Dean Thomas, and David Ames.

Patty Loew (Ojibwe)



"About five years ago, my world harmonically converged around lacrosse, 'baaga'adowe,' as we call it. First, an elder told me an enthralling story about how our people, the Ojibwe, using lacrosse as a ruse, captured a nearby fort during Pontiac's rebellion. Then, I heard about an effort on the Red Cliff Reservation to reintroduce lacrosse to kids. Problem was, although they'd found equipment and instructors, there were no other Native teams to play against. A couple of weeks later, my son's high school announced it would introduce lacrosse as a varsity sport. The coach called to ask if I could share some history about the game. Soon after I produced a PBS story about Native baseball and learned that back at the turn of the century, players sometimes used lacrosse sticks to pitch batting practice (toughened up the batters and boy, did they learn how to hit fast balls!). Everywhere I turned, it seemed, I bumped into the sport. When my friend Michelle Danforth, an Oneida filmmaker, suggested that we co-produce a documentary about lacrosse, I had already been primed. But first, we traded jabs. She boasted that her people, the Oneida, had invented the game. I suggested that the Oneida, playing with their big-basket 'wussy' sticks, should try a real stick, the small-basket Ojibwe sticks that require actual skill.... And so it began. How could I not do this documentary?"

By the Numbers

1. The name commonly used for the sacred stick game is "lacrosse." The name was given to the game by the French settlers for games played with a stick (crosse) and ball.
2. Lacrosse is considered the oldest sport in North America and was first documented by a Jesuit missionary named Jean de Brebeuf in 1638.
3. In 1867, a Canadian dentist named George Beers created a standardized set of rules and parameters for the lacrosse game including field dimensions, number of players, etc.
4. The very first college to organize a lacrosse team was New York University. This was in 1877. Today, there are 400 college teams and 1200 high-school men's teams in the United States.
5. The Iroquois Nation is actually six nations including the following tribes: Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Tuscarora.
6. Like many other Native tribes, the word "Iroquois" was given to them by others. The word is a combination of Algonquin and French which actually means "rattlesnakes." The tribal name is actually "Haudenosaunee" which means "people of the long house."
7. There is archeological evidence which dates the construction of longhouses back to at least 1100 A.D. which places the people on the land long before the Europeans arrived.
8. The Iroquois are often credited for influencing the development of current-day democracy. The history and stories speak of a holy man who was simply called "Peacemaker" (Deganawida) who had a vision guiding him to unite the warring Iroquois Tribes as early as 1451. They formed an alliance that still continues today in the Six Nations.



Delby Powless, a Mohawk lacrosse player from the Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation near Brantford, Ontario. Powless plays for the Buffalo Bandits of the National Lacrosse League and formerly for the Hamilton Nationals of Major League Lacrosse.

Photo by Michelle Danforth and Patty Loew.

Reflect & Relate

1. In the film, we are told the beautiful Iroquois creation story which includes the playing of “the creator’s game.” Twin brothers are born, one of lightness and one of darkness. This ancient story is reflective of many stories both ancient and current. What stories either in books, movies, or legends can you recall that contain a battle between light and dark—or good and evil?
2. To the Iroquois Nations, lacrosse is more than just a game. In the story mentioned above, the Creator gives the two brothers the stick game as a way to work out their differences without war or killing each other. How would our world be different if all cultures played “the creator’s game”?
3. George Beers is known as the man who standardized the rules of lacrosse and made it an international game. In the film, we see how he took teams from the Iroquois Nations to play on playing fields across the world. How do you think this changed the game?
4. As the game grew in popularity, international teams were finding it impossible to beat the Iroquois Nations’ teams. It was decided that since the Native team was being given travel money, that they could no longer be classified as an “amateur” team. They were then excluded from the game and not reinstated until 1987. What is your response to this? What is the irony embedded in this policy play?
5. What is the difference between racism on an individual level and what is sometimes called “institutional racism”? Can you think of examples of both? Which form of racism do you think causes harm to a community of people? Explain your ideas.

Ideas for Action

1. Sovereignty is a complex cultural and political issue in all of our Native nations. In your classroom or group, do research to discover what the word “sovereignty” means as it relates to Native cultures. Why is it important? How does tribal sovereignty affect relations between Native nations and other units of government?
2. Based on your own research in the above activity, explore why the entry of the Iroquois Nations into the international lacrosse games was so significant. How did “sovereignty” play a role?
3. In the film, it said again and again that for the Iroquois Nations the game of lacrosse is more than just a game. It is tied to many ceremonies and the healing of both individuals and their community. As a class or group, explore the role that sports play in your own community. What are the “healing” benefits? What are the downsides?
4. The French and Indian War has been given many names throughout history. Despite its common name, it was not a war between the French and the Indians. As a class or group, explore the period of time leading up to the war and describe the relationships that Native tribes had with the early French traders. How does this compare with their relationship with the British? What were the fundamental differences and how did that affect future outcomes?



Reenactment of the taking of Fort Michilimackinac during Pontiac’s Rebellion by ruse of a lacrosse game. On June 2, 1763, in an effort to restore French possession of the fort, the Ojibwe led an attack on British troops garrisoned there. Ojibwe ball players intentionally threw the ball over the picketing and when British troops opened the gates to throw it back, the Ojibwe rushed the fort and overwhelmed its occupants.

Photo by Michelle Danforth and Patty Loew.

Resources

Internet Resources

www.onondaganation.org	www.iroquois.algonquinlonghouse.org
www.oneida-nsn.gov	www.uslacrosse.org/TopNav/MuseumHallofFame/History.aspx
www.mohawktribe.com	http://apps.uslacrosse.org/museum/halloffame/view_profile.php?prof_id=136
www.sni.org	www.cayuganation-nsn.gov
www.laxhistory.com	www.e-lacrosse.com
www.iroquoisnationals.org	www.lacrosse.ca

Written Resources

Michael & Ernest Benedict. Mitchell.
(1978) *Tewaarathan (Lacrosse)*
Akwesasne's Story of Our National Game. North
American Indian Travelling College; First Edition.

(1994). *Lacrosse: North America's Game*.
Lacrosse Magazine.

Donald M. Fisher. *Lacrosse: A History of the Game*.
The John Hopkins University Press.



Young fans cheer
on the Iroquois
Nationals lacrosse
team. As of 2011, the
Iroquois Nationals
lacrosse team
remains the only
Native American
national team
allowed to play
international sports.

Photo by Michelle
Danforth and
Patty Loew.



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This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master's in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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Educational resources for this film are available at www.visionmakermedia.org/education/sacred_stick.